

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 30, 2012

Agenda Item: Brucellosis Working Group Report

Division/Bureau: Wildlife

Action Needed: Informational

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 1 hour

Background

Brucellosis results from infection with the *Brucella abortus* bacteria and is known to exist in wild bison and elk and occasionally domestic livestock within the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). Recent livestock cases in the GYA have been linked to transmission from wildlife, with elk being the most likely source. While significant negative impacts to elk have not been clearly identified in Montana, brucellosis can impact the livestock industry and individual producers. Changes in USDA-APHIS rules reduced the likelihood of entire states losing brucellosis-free status because of isolated livestock cases, but put increased focus on areas where brucellosis is known to exist in wildlife. As a result, the Montana Board of Livestock established a designated surveillance area (DSA) in 2010, which requires increased cattle testing and vaccination efforts by producers within the DSA.

Montana surveillance efforts using blood tests to determine exposure rates (seroprevalence) to *B. abortus* in elk began in the late 1980s. Seroprevalence estimates for GYA elk from the late 1980s and early 1990s were below 2%. Surveillance conducted within the last 10-15 years reveal what appear to be increasing seroprevalence in some elk populations.

In response to seroprevalence rates, livestock infections, the DSA and debate among livestock and wildlife interests, in fall 2011 the FWP Commission endorsed the concept of a citizen working group to explore elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis. The specific objective of this working group was to identify and propose elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis for consideration by the FWP Commission. As an initial step, the group framed a problem or issue statement to help communicate and guide this effort. The working group met six times and has developed guidelines and recommendations. These guidelines, if endorsed by the FWP Director and Commission, will help focus future elk management in areas with brucellosis.

The informational presentation will generally describe the working group's efforts and products. The presentation is meant to provide the FWP Commission with an overall sense of the process, and some understanding of the working group recommendations prior to any formal adoption and public review. A more detailed presentation of the working group's process and results, including rationale behind the preferred alternative, will be presented later in October or November 2012 for the FWP Commission's *first* formal decision action on this topic.

Public Involvement Process & Results

While the working group meetings were announced and open to public attendance and comment there has been relatively little public comment on this specific effort. The public will have the opportunity to comment at the fall meeting and during the subsequent comment period. Any *final* commission adoption would likely take place in early 2013 after the public comment period closes and comments have been presented to the commission.

FWP Website Link to additional information to include brucellosis research efforts:
<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/elk/areasWithBrucellosisWG/default.html>